

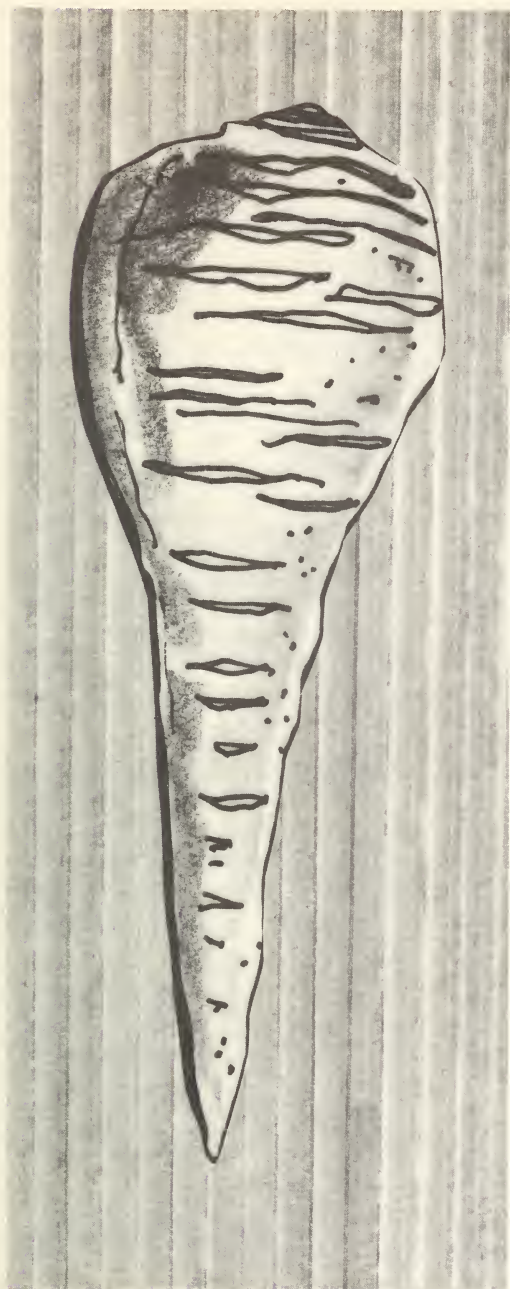
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# GROWING PARSNIPS

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# Growing Parsnips

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Parsnips have high food value and can be kept for late-winter or early-spring use when the supply of other vegetables may be limited. Their eating quality is greatly improved by storage at near-freezing temperatures.

Parsnips can be grown over much of the United States. Most of the commercial production is in the northern half of the country, because of the cooler climate. Parsnips grow best where they can be planted in the spring, can grow during a mild summer, and can be harvested in cool weather.

In the warmer, drier areas of the South, a good stand may be difficult to obtain when parsnips are grown during the summer. Fertile soil, ample moisture, and good culture are more important, however, than the geographical location of the planting.

Parsnips are comparatively expensive to grow and require much hand work. Also, they occupy the land for a period long enough to grow two or three short-season crops. Home gardeners generally find a row 30 to 50 feet long ample for their needs.

## VARIETIES AND SEED

Commonly grown varieties of parsnips include All-American, Guernsey, and Hollow Crown.

All-American, the most popular variety, reaches harvest stage in about 105 days. The flesh is white, with small tender core and fine flavor. The roots are smooth and slender, and grow 10 to 12 inches long and about 3 inches thick at the shoulder.

Guernsey reaches harvest stage in about 100 days. The skin is light and quite smooth. The flesh is fine grained, tender, and sugary. The roots grow 12 inches long, 3 inches across at the shoulder, and taper gradually to the tip.

Hollow Crown reaches harvest stage in about 120 days. When fully developed, the roots are 15 inches long,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches across at the shoulder, and have few side roots. The flesh is fine grained, white, and of good quality.

Parsnip seed retains its vitality for a very short period. Never plant seed more than a year old. Plant one-half ounce of seed for each 100 feet of row, or 3 to 5

pounds per acre. The exact amount to plant per acre will depend on the spacing of rows.

## SOIL AND SOIL FERTILITY

Parsnips will grow in any deep, fertile soil, but they grow best in a deep, rich loam or sandy loam with ample moisture.

Old garden land—soil that is in a high state of fertility as a result of long and continuing manuring and cultivation—is excellent.

Parsnips benefit from manure, but fresh, coarse manure may cause the roots to branch or become rough. Fresh manure may be applied during the previous season on the preceding crop, or manure that is well rotted may be worked into the soil as it is being prepared for parsnips.

Commercial fertilizer can be used. In general, apply 5-10-5 fertilizer at a rate of 1,000 to 2,000 pounds per acre, or 25 to 50 pounds per 1,000 square feet of land. Reduce the amount of fertilizer if manure is used.

Apply the fertilizer before planting, and work it well into the soil. Many growers prefer to mix about 500 pounds per acre in the soil of the rows and broadcast the rest. For row application, such as in home gardens, a rate of 3 to 5 pounds per 100 feet of row is sufficient, and additional broadcast applications are unnecessary.

## PLANTING AND CULTIVATION

Parsnips should be planted soon after the weather and soil have warmed up.

A well-prepared seedbed is essential. Work or plow the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches unless such depth results in turning up more than an inch of subsoil below the usual working depth. All clods must be finely broken up and all trashy material such as stones, sticks, and roots must be removed. Shallow, cloddy, or stony soil can cause roots to be rough and misshapen.

Before seeding, work the top inch or two of soil with a smoothing harrow or a steel rake. If any trash remains on or near the surface, hand raking is recommended.

Sow the seed in shallow furrows by hand or with a hand drill. A tractor-drawn gang seeder can be used for large plantings. For cultivation by hand or with a power wheel hoe, space the rows 18 to 24 inches apart. For cultivation by tractor- or horse-drawn equipment, space the rows 24 to 30 inches apart. Cover the seed with one-half inch of soil.

Parsnip seed germinates slowly and, if the soil is dry, may not come up at all. Ways to hasten and improve germination and emergence are:

- Cover the seed with leafmold, sandy loam, a mixture of sifted coal ashes and soil, or other similar material that will not pack or form a crust.

- Firm the soil over the row after seeding.

- Water dry soil with a sprinkling system.

- Sow a few radish seeds along with the parsnips; the radishes will break the crust and permit the par-



snip seedlings to emerge. This can provide a double crop for home gardeners.

When the parsnip plants are well established, thin them to 3 to 4 inches apart.

Cultivate to control weeds until the plant leaves practically cover the ground. When mechanical cultivation becomes impracticable, control weeds by hoeing or pulling. Parsnips continue to grow until the first hard frosts.

## HARVESTING AND STORAGE

Parsnips may be dug, topped, and stored in cold storage, in a cellar, or in an outdoor pit. Or they may be left in the ground over winter or until needed.

Storage temperature in a cold storage room or in a cellar should remain between 32° and 40° F. Parsnips stored at that temperature range improve in quality faster than those left in the field at warmer ground temperatures.

And, since parsnips dry out readily in storage, the humidity must be kept between 90 and 95 percent. Plastic film crate liners retard wilting.

Parsnips improve in quality when they remain chilled in the ground,

but they are not improved further by freezing. They will tolerate alternate freezing and thawing in place in the soil, but are damaged if frozen after harvest. Parsnips left in the ground over winter should be removed before growth starts in the spring, because the roots soon become woody and unpalatable.

For additional information on storage, ask your county agent for a copy of Home and Garden Bulletin 119, "Storing Vegetables and Fruits in Basements, Cellars, Outbuildings, and Pits." Or get a free copy by sending a post card with the number and title of the publication and your return address to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Include your ZIP Code in your return address.

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There is no basis for the belief that parsnips that remain in the ground over winter are poisonous. All reported cases of poisoning from eating so-called wild parsnips have been traced to water hemlock (*Cicuta*), which belongs to the same family and resembles the parsnip somewhat.

Avoid gathering wild plants that look like the parsnip.

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